

# 'ELEPAIO

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## The Supposed California Record of a Hawaiian Hawk, *Buteo solitarius*

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Even to those with wide knowledge of the scientific nomenclature of birds, the name *Onychotes gruberi* is unlikely to be familiar. This was proposed as a new genus and species by Robert Ridgway (1870) for a specimen of a hawk (dark phase) supposedly from California that had been sent to the Smithsonian Institution by Ferdinand Gruber. "The collector and donor of the specimen . . . is a zealous naturalist and accomplished taxidermist of San Francisco, having added much to our knowledge of the birds of California, through the frequent contribution of valuable specimens" (Ridgway 1870:150). The specimen had been cataloged in 1866 by Spencer F. Baird, who queried its provenance as well as that of other specimens received from Gruber at the same time (Deignan 1961). Ridgway (1876) identified as the same species a second specimen (light phase) that was totally without data but was also assumed to be from California. These specimens were sent to European specialists who could not identify them with any species of Old World buteonines, for which reason *Onychotes gruberi* was carried for some time as a probable North American species of hawk (e.g., Baird et al. 1874, Sharpe 1874, Gurney 1876, 1881).

Ridgway (1885) himself later deduced that *Onychotes gruberi* was in fact identical with the Hawaiian Hawk (*Buteo solitarius*), although he still maintained *Onychotes* for it as a genus or subgenus. Gurney (1891) concurred in the identification but did not think the species separable from *Buteo* and mentioned that the California locality was thought to be erroneous. Henshaw (1901:162-3), however, cited a secondhand observation of a hawk landing on a ship "some 200 miles outward bound from Hilo"; the hawk preyed on seabirds and stayed with the ship until "about the time when the California coast was sighted." He assumed that this was an example of *Buteo solitarius* and that this occurrence might lend support to the possibility that "the specimen upon which *Onychotes gruberi* was based actually reached California alive, possibly by the same means as the individual here mentioned." Henshaw (1902:197) later reported a similar instance of a hawk that boarded a ship "400 miles off the southern point of Hawaii" and that was shot but lost overboard. This was reported to Henshaw by a person said to be "well acquainted with the Hawaiian Hawk." Grinnell (1932) and Grinnell and Miller (1944) maintained *Buteo solitarius* on the California hypothetical list, citing Henshaw (1901) as establishing that "there is a chance" that the type of *Onychotes gruberi* "was a far vagrant naturally occurring, and actually captured, in California" (Grinnell and Miller 1944:561).

Whereas we can never positively determine that this was not the case, circumstantial evidence suggests that a vagrant origin for the type of *Onychotes gruberi* is unlikely. The industry of Ferdinand Gruber in obtaining exotic specimens of birds was fortuitously noticed in 1879 by Otto Finsch (1880) when he was in San Francisco prior to depart-



Hawaiian Hawk (Io, *Buteo solitarius*).

Photo by R.J. Shallenberger

ing for Hawaii. Finsch visited the California Academy of Sciences and reported:

Their collections are very limited, and cannot be compared with those in Woodward's Garden, which have been amassed by the zeal of Mr. Gruber, now keeper of the Museum there. Mr. Gruber has carried out an idea which I had long ago in my mind . . . This is a representation of the chief types of the different zoological centres of the globe by giving good illustrations of the fauna of the different parts of the earth in stuffed specimens, in accordance with the peculiar flora. This very instructive invention, which Mr. Gruber calls a "Zoographicon" is not only made to rotate as a whole, so that the different views follow each other, but the chief representatives of it are also in motion: the Woodpecker hammers; the Dipper dives; the Ducks swim, and so on. This gives the whole a Marionette-like character, which of course is very attractive to the greater part of the visitors. The "Zoographicon" is always crowded!

Such an enterprise would have assured that Gruber was in contact with suppliers of natural history specimens far from California. That he certainly received birds from the Hawaiian Islands is proven by a specimen of 'Apapane (*Himatione sanguinea*) that I examined in the collections of the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna. This bears a date of 1863 and was cataloged as number 50731 on 6 July 1864. It was purchased from Gruber in a lot of 24 specimens of 22 species, the remainder of which occur in western North America, with the exception of an African touraco (*Turacus*). The original label is printed up to read "Exploration of the State of California F. GRUBER, Naturalist 186\_\_ J.G.W. Schulte, Agt. San Francisco" with "dark red Nectarinia bird. Sandwich Island. No. 3056" written in by hand.

This proves that Gruber had obtained birds from the Hawaiian Islands (and also from Africa) only a few years before the type specimen of "*Onychotes gruberi*" was cataloged at Washington. It is not known who ultimately supplied Gruber's Hawaiian birds, but one possible source during that period was Andrew Garrett, a collector of natural history objects who was based in Hawaii from 1852 until the end of 1863 (Thomas 1979). Although Garrett was primarily interested in marine life, there are numerous Hawaiian birds attributed to him in the collections of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, and additional specimens at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University (Olson and H.F. James, unpubl. data). Regardless of the collector's identity, because of Gruber's proven Hawaiian connection, the claim for a place for *Buteo solitarius* in the avifauna of California has been even further diminished.

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